

# THE CATALYST

*(kat' ə-list) n., an agent that provokes change*

VOLUME 18, # 1

BUCKNELL CAUCUS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

OCTOBER 2000

## THE CATALYST Begins Again

Welcome to the new version of *The Catalyst*. It has a history. Soon after Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, about half a dozen students and faculty founded the "Bucknell Progressive Caucus," or the BPC. Our activities aimed most essentially at keeping alive a progressive voice on an isolated and rich campus. In the spring of 1981, the Caucus launched a publication we called *The Catechist*, something that "questions searchingly and fully." In March 1983, we changed its name to *The Catalyst*, "an agent that provokes change." For the next twelve years, as a collective of 8-10 students and 2-3 faculty members, we published *The Catalyst* three or four times a year. Though we included the occasional poem or other artistic piece, we mostly stuck to progressive political and economic analysis. We stopped publishing in 1992.

To our great surprise, a different form of *The Catalyst* popped up in March 1993, involving none of us and with a changed focus. This periodical was dedicated, in its words, to "political, social, and personal liberation . . . to awaken the 'rugged individualism' of the past." Interestingly, the editors called their first issue "Volume 1, Number 1," as if the other publication had not, in fact, existed for over a decade. This reconstituted brand of the journal appeared each semester from Spring 1993 through Spring 1997.

We now come forward with a third incarnation of *The Catalyst*, this time as the voice of the Bucknell Caucus for Economic Justice, in spirit a direct descendent of the BPC. The BCEJ -- whose origin and purposes are described on page two -- was started last fall to bring attention to how distant are Bucknell's actual employment practices from its *Mission Statement* commitment "to engage in institutional programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice." We decided to label this issue Volume 18, Number 1, to mark the eighteenth year that *The Catalyst* has been published at Bucknell.

## JOB # 1593

*The Catalyst* will analyze, in the light of day, unjust structural conditions at Bucknell -- many of which emerge from the terrible inequality of employment compensation, prestige, and personal power at the university (see the box on page two for some exemplary statistics). This article suggests that at the very top of the Bucknell ladder there is apparently a serious lack of sensitivity about what might constitute fair employment practices on this campus.

The story begins in early September, when several BCEJ members noticed the following ad in *Notes and Notices*, a publication circulated to faculty, staff, and administration:

### *Special Events Assistant*

*Personnel Services seeks applicants for a full-time (non-benefits eligible) Special Events Assistant, in the division of University Relations. Position is scheduled for 35 hours per week with occasional night and weekend hours. Responsibilities include the planning and implementation of the President's events, University Relations events, key institution-wide events and unique events as requested. Additional responsibilities will include supporting the President's spouse in creating and handwriting correspondence, overseeing the preparations of the President's House for all events scheduled in this area, managing travel and itinerary for the President's spouse and maintaining the spouse's calendar. Will also post and reconcile the budget account for the President's House budget and resolve discrepancies with the finance office and/or vendors. Three to five years experience in an administrative support position required as well as excellent written and oral communication skills. Must be able to handle multiple priorities in a fast paced environment while paying attention to detail and accuracy. Must be able to work effectively with a variety of administrative offices and function comfortably and effectively as an ambassador for the University. Interested applicants should submit an application/resume with cover letter to Personnel Services by September 15, 2000. Please refer to Job #1593.*

In response to this ad, which genuinely amazed some of us with its lack of political sensitivity and sense of fairness, including its seeming oblivion to various gender implications, the BCEJ wrote President Rogers the following letter on September 13, copies of which we sent to Peggy Plympton, Vice President for Finance; Richard Zansitis, University Counsel; and Catherine Sweeney, Head of Personnel:

*Dear President Rogers:*

Attached is the job advertisement from the September 1, 2000 *Notes and Notices* for a person to assist your household in various duties. We read, with both dismay and frustration, that this advertisement calls for a highly-skilled and multi-talented person who will be asked to work during the days and on some evenings and weekends, yet who also will be asked to work 35 hours per week without benefits. We believe this advertisement is inconsistent with the university's commitment to justice as stated proudly and emphatically in its "Mission Statement." An employer's not providing benefits imposes real financial burdens, present and future, on employees and their families. Certainly, we are all aware of high and growing medical costs, educational expenses, and constant reminders that we should not depend on just Social Security for retirement. Virtual "full-time jobs" without benefits, particularly at a wealthy institution like Bucknell, are simply not right.

If an employer in the U.S. sets the hours for a job at 35 per week, a reasonable inference can be drawn that the employer is trying to avoid paying the benefits that would be required if the position were a 40-hour-a-week one. Bucknell's not doing so in this case -- for a job that involves working directly with the president's household -- sets a particularly troubling tone for the institution as a whole in its relationship to employees and the wider community. Further, there is something embarrassing, and quite extraordinarily so, about having such an employee work in the household of a family that receives at least \$30,000 of benefits from Bucknell, along with the highest salary on the campus and the biggest house to live in. This situation, however, is just a particularly egregious instance of a larger problem. That anyone at Bucknell would have to work almost full-time without benefits, as many do, is, to us, unacceptable, and we implore you to rectify that injustice.

As a minimal but important first step, we urge you to have this advertisement replaced with one more consistent with Bucknell's stated commitment to justice.

Please contact us about this matter as soon as possible through one of our faculty advisers (indicated below).

As we go to press, we have not received a reply from President Rogers, nor from the other three administrative officers to whom we sent our letter. We were surprised and further dismayed by this lack of response, and do not know the current status of the recruitment for the job. As it stands, then, the implicit message in the ad for Job # 1593 is that essentially full-time jobs without benefits are fine at Bucknell, even inside the house of the university president. Such a message speaks legions about how much work we all must do to move toward a compensation system more consistent with what Bucknell so proudly trumpets: "to engage in institutional programs and practices that exemplify compassion, civility, and a sense of justice."

**ANY NEWS? If you would like to submit an article about any aspect of economic inequity at Bucknell, or know of**

**such a situation, please contact one of the members of the Editorial Collective, listed to the right. Anonymity will be rigorously protected. We'll publish again soon -- as the need arises.**

**JOIN US? If you'd like to become a part of the BCEJ, email one of us listed to the right, and we will add your name to our mailing list.**

## **BCEJ INDEX\***

President's salary: \$170,000

President's Benefits (Including Health, Retirement, etc.): \$30,000  
Special Presidential Extras: Free Housing and Utilities, and More

Average Salary, Plus Benefits, of Top Three Administrative Officers: \$150,000

•  
Full-Time Food Service Workers: 62  
Number Making Less than \$7.00 an Hour: 25  
Number Making Less than \$10 an Hour (An Approximate Living Wage in this Area): 51  
Number of Part-Time Dining Service Workers: 72  
Number Making a Living Hourly Wage: 2  
Number Receiving Benefits: 0

•  
Number of Threatening Letters Sent to Food Service Workers When They Were Approached by Labor Organizers: 1

\*Data on salaries are approximations from available sources.

## **The BCEJ -- Who We Are**

The BCEJ was formed last fall by a group of students, staff, and faculty after some students were shown a union-bashing letter that had long been sent out by Bucknell's administration whenever any workers here displayed interest in joining a union. We thought the letter was coercive and misleading, and workers have said it made them feel threatened. It claimed to be "personal comments" but was essentially the same one that had been sent by a different administrator before, and urged employees not to be pro-union (with veiled threats like the mention of staffing in "difficult times"). It also included the crudely ironic comment that, "It just does not make sense to me to bring a union in to get the same good wages, benefits and working conditions you already have." Last year, VP Plympton agreed temporarily to stop sending it, then President Adams defended the letter. This year, President Rogers met with BCEJ representatives and agreed not to circulate such a letter again. We are pleased that the new administration has taken this initial step toward addressing the job inequities that exist at Bucknell, and want it to do more. The Caucus now consists of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. One of our biggest concerns is fair employment for all

people on campus. More about that appears in this edition of *The Catalyst*, and more is to come. We publish because we believe that once people here know more about unfair employment situations on campus, they will want to do something about them.

***The Catalyst* Editorial Collective for this issue:**

Ariane Allen, Brian Eyler, Dawn Lonsinger, Julie McLaughlin,  
Alex Monticello, Sandra Morris, Karl Patten, Bekka Payack,  
R. J. Prushnok, Megan Rancier, Charles Sackrey, Geoff Schneider,  
Doug Sturm, Paul Susman, Carol Wayne White